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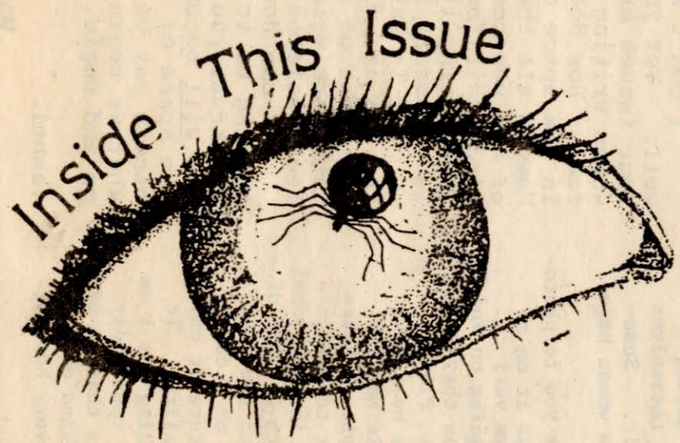

The Story Behind the NAC Debate ..... P. 4

The Federal Election is over and it's back to business and usual Tory style. Nonetheless, the story of how the NAC three leader debate on women's issues held in Toronto August 15th remains an interesting story still worth telling.

Isolation A Common Alberta Experience ..... P. 7

One of the most common bonds among Alberta women, whether they call themselves feminist or not, is isolation. Some Grande Prairie feminists talk about isolation in their lives and how it affects their needs, decisions. perspectives on the world and the tone and structure of the local women's community.

Evil - Grim Reality or Comic Cosmic Fantasy? ..... P. 9

One woman's story of her explorations into the nature of evil, an exploration that takes her through the books of Hannah Arendt and into the recesses of her own herstory.

Women's Spirituality and Nothingness ..... P. 12

Women's journies to find their own spirituality are many and varied. One common element these journies often have is the dive into nothingness. Here is one feminist's thoughts and recollections.

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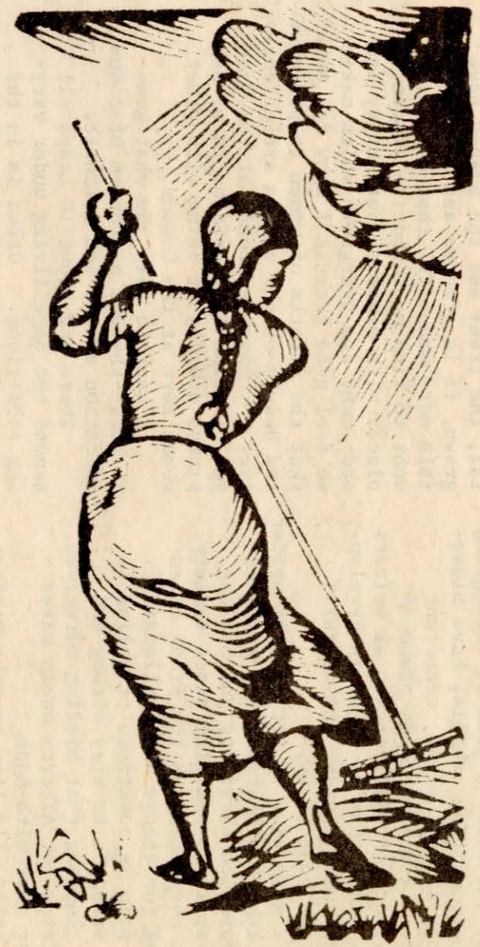


U Vic Extension

OUR OWN WORDS

Dear Wonderful Women of Webspinner

I'm writing this letter naked in the sun AND I'M NOT PORNOGRAPHY.

Congratulations--and my heartfelt thanks for superb coverage on sexual terrorism.

Special congrats to Mair, Suzn and Meaghan, who after a year of struggling with their writing skills, have blossomed into strong, clear, competent writers. I'm especially proud of these women for their growth as writers and the risks they've taken in developing their skills under the watchful eye of the rest of us.

I'd also like to let all the spider ladies know how gratefully I received their words on surviving and healing ourselves in a sexually cruel society. Without even being on the front lines lobbying for change and challenging... my own pain is sometimes crippling in my own struggle to stay strong and brave. Knowing that healing ourselves is an issue for Alberta women makes my heart soar with hope.

Finally, I'd like to make contact with the women hosting the Healing Images of Women exhibit. I've been photographing women taking care of themselves all summer in the hope of sharing their inspirational images. Can you help me?

Rita Ranks, Banff.
PS. I'm adopting a coffee break.

The Provincial Government, Department of Social Services and Community Health, informed the Board of Directors of the Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women (YES) on July 23, 1984, that funding for an 11 bed facility has been approved in the amount of $106, 320.00 This is the provincial government's commitment for 80% of the total operating budget. The Yellowhead Region, consisting of the communities of Grande Cache, Hinton, Jasper and Edson is responsible for raising the remaining 20% of the yearly operating costs. This amount totals $26, 580.00 The facility will be purchased through a mortgage with CMHC. The mortgage payments are part of the operating budget mentioned above.

The YES for Women Society was formed by a group of citizens from the above communities who were concerned about the problem of battering. Over the past year, the Society has been active in obtaining funds to establish a battered women's shelter for the Yellowhead area. Now that approval has been received from both theProvincial and Federal Governments, YES for Women hopes to be in operation by the spring of 1985.

For more information--
Wendy Bailer Palk
723 6318

A letter to a reader from a friend at Greenham Common.

Dear Kurt:

I arrived at camp today after finishing my exams. Every time I come here it feels amazingly special, the trees and the bushes have grown, it is greener and if possible more beautiful than ever. I went to find my favourite places, places with memories both happy and sad--many are overgrown which makes me feel good because I know for sure that the efforts of women to preserve the beauty of the common are effective. I haven't looked at the base yet, I think I'll hold on to my happiness and joy at being with other women here at the Common.

I want to tell you what goes on here--there's a problem of communication across the Atlantic.

There are about 10 camps all around the base living under varying conditions. Green is in the wood so there is a lot of space to do what we want. Indigo has a patch of gravel by the gate and has to walk down the road to the shit pit. The authorities seem to hassle the women on the north side to a greater degree than here in the calm of the south side. I suppose mainly because they are so much more exposed. There are many actions happening all the time-making blockades in the road, painting signs, roads and this morning a transporter. Also women cut the fence and go in; on May 1st we took cycles and roller skates inside. It was great fun and we were released and we got back the bikes. Then on a visibility day women cut the fence until they were charged--sometimes arrested three times. They refused bail in an attempt to get publicity but the press silenced us. One day I rang a radio station; my line was tapped and I was cut off three times.

Then the life of the camp goes on; going to court with women, visiting women in jail, sitting round the campfire chatting, making cups of tea, cutting hair and making things. Women come and go from day to day, women come for night watches. I feel that it is very important to tell the world what is happening here which is basically loving communities. Women find themselves drawn here as if by magic. Sometimes there are very few women here but the camps go on.

I would like to ask you to photocopy this letter and pass it on to women around you. I am very frightened by what is going on and I feel that if people know they will do something about it. Please... I know they test Cruise near you, we have got to stop this madness. I was in Alberta a couple of years ago--it is so different to here.

There is to be an international women's strike from 20th to 30th of September--please spread the word.

We were bombarded on D day by endless pictures of veterans; our society has a war mentality. It really is very frightening but I am sure we can stop it by repeatedly telling our governments that we can no longer accept this kind of existence. I am feeling very hopeful.

Dear Webspinner:

Thankyou for another great issue. I appreciate that you endured the pain necessary to create your issue on sexual terrorism. A few years ago I lived with a woman whose husband and father had abused her physically, verbally and emotionally. When we were finally able to have a home without these men we set some ground rules. There was no shouting, sarcasm or violence of any sort allowed in our house. Everyone in the family hugged everyone else at least once a day. (This was hard for her two sons to get used to, thanks to their social conditioning). With much effort and love we were able to create a safe place where we could each be ourselves and let our defences down, knowing we would be accepted.

Thankyou especially to Suzn and Mair for your articles. You each released me from guilt for meeting my own needs at the cost of denying that energy to some cause or someone else. I too need privacy to live inside myself. I too need to see beauty and be refreshed before I can press on. By articulating my vague uneasinesses, you have given me permission to laugh and sing and play between the tears. Thankyou

Leslie Wilkins, Calgary.

Dear Webspinner:

I don't know you very well. Yet you excite me. Your issues are full of energy--women writing what they know and feel. How does all that happen in the space of 72 hours or so? How do all the bits and pieces of the web come together and find their form? Does a common theme bring it together? What is necessary for you to become?

It is Saturday afternoon and you are eluding us. The pressures of our own expectations are weighing us down. We feel isolated from one another.

I can hear you calling us, telling us to let go and let you be, trust you to become. And you will become--perhaps not in the space of this 72 hours; others may be called to finish what we begin. And so I let go and begin...

Vashti.

Even cowgirls get through the blues

By Calamity Jane

I came to this workshop to "re-enter the movement". I had not "done" anything for women for three years, I thought. I had spent that time working on my "self", so that I would feel stronger, so that I would have some personal strength to share and to be able to help other women. I was on a journey from self-destruction to self-esteem.

Since I was a child I have eaten to "stuff down" my feelings. If I felt too intensely, I'd eat--out of control, until I was groggy, stuperous and finally unconscious. Sleep, the great escape. There was no contact between me and my "self". I created a wall of fat, self-hatred and derision between me and the rest of the world.

Those were the "grey years". A lifetime of denying who and what I was, adding layer upon layer of fat; insulating and shielding me from looking at and feeling myself. There were ten years of meaningless, faceless, countless close encounters of the worst kind; one-night stands with men I neither liked nor respected. Why should I? I neither liked nor respected myself.

Near the beginning of those 10 years I was raped. This reinforced my feelings of uselessness. I was a nothing, I had been used, abused, violated. I had a tenuous support system and never dealt with the rape. It had happened and I felt, somehow, that I had deserved it. My appearance in court and cross-examination by the defence reinforced all that.

I came to Overeaters Anonymous a year and a half ago. I hated myself and did not believe that anyone else could possibly care for me. I judged the warm gestures of others as gestures empty of feeling; that they were just trying to be nice to me. I felt guilty about any food I put into my mouth. Surely somone who was my size didn't deserve to eat. I was physically, emotionally and spiritually sick. Fortunately, I had arrived at the place where it was less painful to face myself than to go on hurting. I was terrified of what terrible things I might realize about myself. I knew what a bad person I was.

O.A. is a 12-step program patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous, changing the words alcohol and alcoholic to food and compulsive overeating. Compulsive overeating is a progressive emotional, physical and spiritual illness. I knew this was where I needed to be. I knew I was sick and need help.

Spiritual progress and personal honesty were two facets I initially refused to deal with, sloughing them off. Those were things foreign to me and "for those who get off on that sort of thing". I was a confirmed atheist and a habitual liar.

Slowly, through the honesty, love and unconditional acceptance offered by others, I timidly, gently and with great trepidation began to be honest with myself in minute amounts. The "others" were mostly women and one special man. We shared our pain, our joys and our love. We supported one another through crises.

Last fall, I came to an O.A. marathon in Grande Prairie. For 12 hours, 25 women and two men shared our experiences, growth, love, tears and laughter.

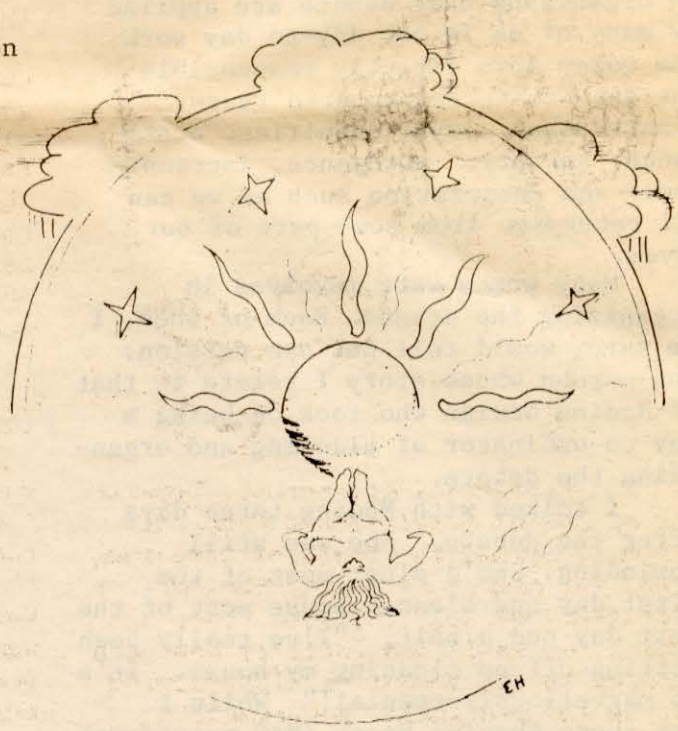
One of my main blocks in the program was dealing with "God as we understand Him". It was the "Him" I refused to accept. If I was ever going to have a relationship with a Higher Power, it would be a "Her". At last! A Higher Power by my own definition. I came to this realization during a circle discussion on spirituality.

Throughout the day every hour and a half or so, we'd have a "hug break". A rough estimate counts 200 hugs in one day, for everyone. There's a lot in a single hug; acceptance, self-acceptance, warmth, sharing and love. By the end of the marathon, energy zoomed around the room, warmth gentled us, power and love joined us all with golden vibrating threads. Tangible energy hummed a powerful accompaniment to our sharing. A sudden realization of the words for the feelings I was experiencing happened. Love, warmth, power, energy were all words traditionally used to describe a Higher Power. That's it! The Goddess was there and we were the Goddess.

So I had a higher power and I was getting honest with myself. All the years of self-denial brought me to the place where I could look at myself and not be afraid. I realized that the most fearful thing I had to face had a name. This terrible thing I had denied my whole lifetime: I love women. I love our strength, humour, intelligence, warmth. When I honestly admitted that and began to celebrate it, my compulsion to overeat left me. I no longer bit my nails. I am proud, strong and free. I now love many women in many ways; easily, freely and not always with their knowledge. I love one woman in particular, a joy to my every day. I also love one very special man. I thank the Goddess within for these two wonderful people.

An old friend told me I look younger and thinner. I know I'm happier. I act on life instead of reacting to it. I still occasionally have days when I overeat or bite my nails. I know when that happens that I'm ignoring some emotion. I recognize that fact and begin to deal with it.

So on this journey, I feel like I've packed, gassed up the car, bought the map and I'm ready to take off! Vancouver, here I come!



Women's Self-Help Network

A woman to celebrate

By Vashti

A significant number of women who make up our history (pardon me, herstory), in the Peace River Country were mail-order war brides sent for by lonely farmers wanting someone to make a home for them on the farm. Many a woman made the long trek from Europe, gathered into a shack or a barn for her wedding and considered herself lucky if the groom wore a clean shirt.

Just a week or so ago someone related to me the story of one such unnamed woman whose husband walked into the farmhouse the day she arrived and rarely came out again. She was left to work the land, care for the children and the house and negotiate the farm business in a foreign tongue as she was not fortunate enough to speak English.

The reports are that when her husband wanted her he'd wave a red flag out of the window and she'd come from the field to cook his meal. I am thankful to report that approximately 10 years after the wedding he died and she was released and eventually became one of the most well-loved people in the community.

I think women with such strength should be celebrated!

How the NAC debate happened...

By Meaghan Dean

I still have a story to tell about the 1984 Canadian Federal Election. It's about how the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) three-leader debate on women's issues at Toronto August 15 came to be.

Yes, the debate is fading in our memories and most politicians are returning their attention to the "real issues" (meeting with Reagan, new uniforms for the Armed Forces, reshuffling blame for the national deficit), yet the story behind the debate remains an important one to tell.

As time passes fewer people will remember who said what during the debate, what the details of the issues were or what became of the promises. What won't be forgotten is that the debate happened. A major and timeless piece of "news" in all this must be the story of how it happened and what it was like to be part of making it happen.

According to nearly every known rule of mainstream politics and mainstream media eventing, that debate should never have happened. How then did it happen?

It is important that we understand not only how it was done but who did it. This debate was not the creation of a few select, mysterious, all-powerful women whose skills and ways of working bear no relation to those of most other women. Many of the techniques, attitudes and responses applied in organizing that debate are applied by many of us in our day-to day work. The women more directly responsible for the debate encountered fears, frustrations, joys, inanities, brilliance, anxiety, arrogance, intransigence and cooperation such as we can all recognize from some part of our lives.

Many women were involved in organizing the debate. Each of them, I am sure, would tell her own version. The person whose story I relate is that of Nadine Nowlan who took on being a key co-ordinator of planning and organizing the debate.

I talked with Nadine three days after the debate. She was still unwinding. She'd slept most of the first day and cleaned house most of the next day and a half. "I've really been getting off on cleaning my house. It's so marvellously--menial!" While I was there Chaviva Hosek (NAC president) called and mentioned she was getting back in touch with reality by cooking lentils. "I've been cooking lentils since yesterday. The pot just keeps getting bigger and bigger. I'm making lentils for the whole world!"

* * *

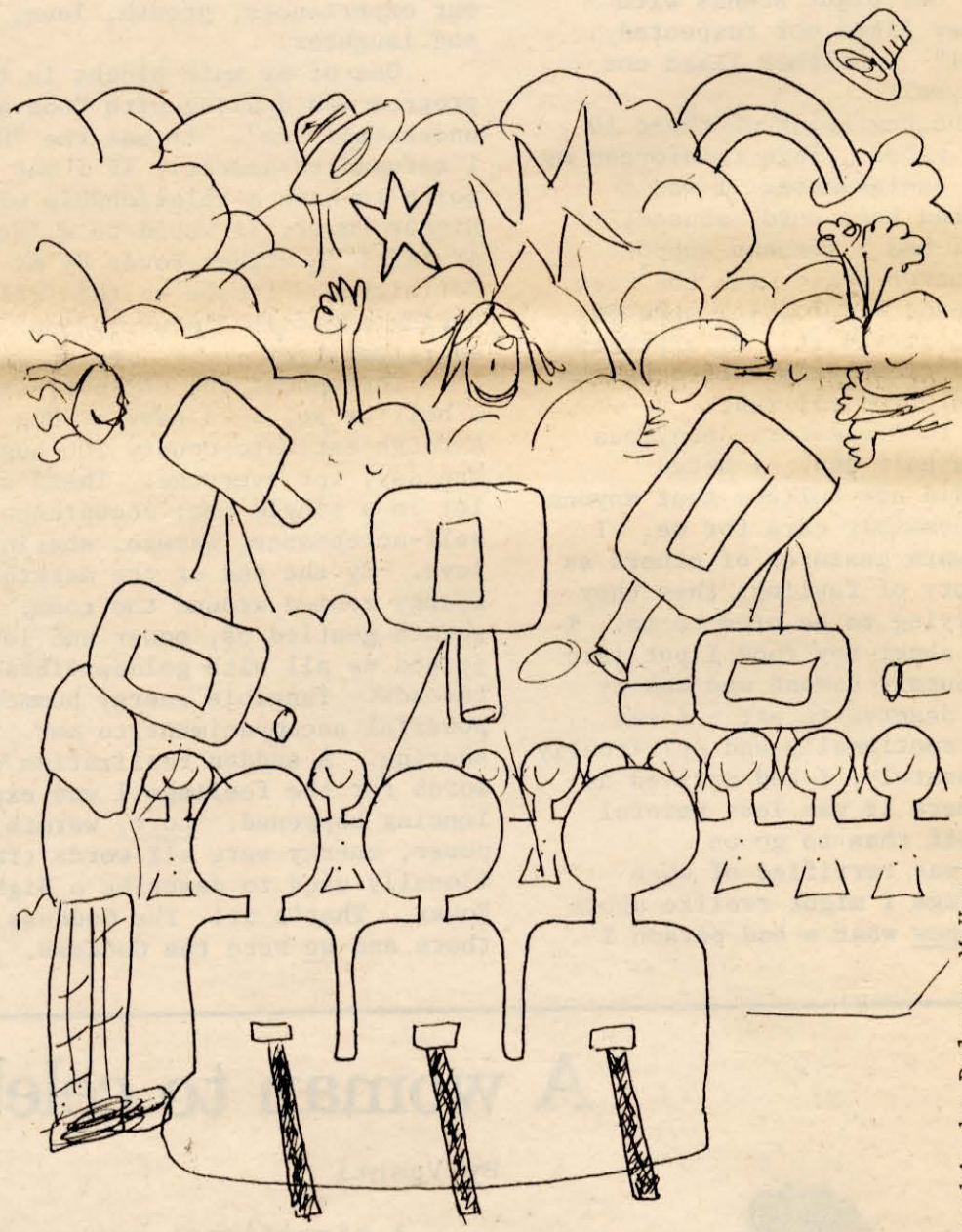
M: I want to tell a story. It seems to have two major elements to it. One is the story of an accomplishment of considerable significance in the overall journey of women becoming more involved in mainstream politics. The other is simply a detailed description of how you organized it--it's an incredible study in organization. How and when did it start?

N: Well, it started when the election was called and I think it was the day after the election was called Chaviva got on the phone and called the three leaders' offices and invited them to a public debate on Aug. 15 that NAC would sponsor on women's issues. I think Broadbent said "yes" almost immediately. Then a little later Mulroney said "yes". There was a lot of things that happened in between those events in terms of lobbying, people making phone calls and urging the people to urge the people to say "yes". Chaviva was orchestrating that and I was aware of that happening--what kind of pressure was being brought in order to encourage the leaders to see this as a win-lose situation for them as well as for us. Mr. Broadbent said, "I will go anywhere anytime and with anybody and do it." Mr. Mulroney basically said "I will debate with all three but not with two." And Turner, at quite a late date, I think it was around July 16, hadn't actually said "yes" but hadn't said "no".

I got involved officially July 16 when I was appointed co-ordinator. Chaviva said to me, "This is an impossible job. We have to organize this in four weeks and you have no staff and no money." It seemed like an offer I couldn't refuse. Turner was still considering it. And then came the famous bum-patting incident and I think the Monday following the bum-patting we got a definite "yes" from Turner. So, at that point we had a "go" situation.

Now, going live we didn't get until the Thursday before the debate (Aug. 9)--less than a week before the networks finally made a decision that we were going to go live. I think initially there were four networks and then another one came in. Now the planning that took place from July 16 onwards assumed that we would have three leaders and assumed it would go live, although we had made some contingency plans.

There was a great deal of uncertainty about exactly what was going to happen until almost the very end. Once Turner said "yes", we had to sit down with the party representatives and we went into a series of rather protracted negotiations. Each party sent two or three representatives and in a sense we had to negotiate the format and all the kinds of ground rules of what would happen and



Graphic by Delores McKone

BREAK THE ISOLATION...

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...a story full of determination...

what wouldn't happen--that took four, five or six meetings with the party representatives. The last meeting on that took place, I think, on Aug. 8 when we finally had all that agreed. We then went to a press conference to announce it and then later that afternoon or early the next day the networks basically announced they were going live. Then the networks came in to see how they could do it in a week.

It was like a pressure cooker--it was wonderful--just like a big pressure cooker. Everybody was under extreme pressure. One of the things that it did was forge links of solidarity among the networks and NAC and the Royal York Hotel staff, the translation people--all of the different elements that went in to do the organizational planning--because we all had so much to lose if it didn't go well. So we became a team--it was kind of like an instant team. So remarkably so that on the night of the debate there were some logistical problems that emerged and I would find that I would go to deal with it and I'd look over and there, standing in the same spot, would be the manager of the Royal York Hotel dealing with the same problem, saying the same things, doing the same things.

It was as if we had some kind of internal radar. And afterwards, NAC people were embracing hotel staff people, producers--we'd only known them for a short time. Tom McKuen was the director of convention services at the Royal York, largely responsible for a lot of the details in terms of implementation and he said that right from the beginning the chemistry was right.

M: What goes into that kind of chemistry?

N: I don't know. I think it's one of the things you don't really understand in the world, but it worked. I've worked in situations where nothing worked, the chemistry was lousy. Where no matter how hard you tried in terms of planning, it would just unravel. Whereas this was sort of put together with a little bailing wire and a lot of crossed fingers and it worked--we actually went live at 8:01 p.m.! Tom came over and said "Nadine, we did it! We went live at 8:01!" This very distringuished looking gentleman with a uniform and terribly capable, but he was reduced to yelling, "We went live at 8:01! Mission accomplished!"

"Certainly the networks let it be known that they couldn't figure out how we ever pulled it off. They hadn't been able to get the leaders to have a live debate that late."

M: What do you think the people involved in the organizing--the networks, the political parties and the Royal York Hotel--learned about women, organizing and politics?

N: Certainly the networks let it be known that they couldn't figure out how we ever pulled it off. They hadn't been able to get the leaders to have a live debate this late. They had wanted to have their debate around the same time we had ours and the leaders had said no. So the networks were really skeptical that we could pull it off. We kept saying "it's gonna happen" and they kept saying "somebody's gonna pull out--it's not gonna happen. They don't want it. They've told us they don't want it." So they were flabbergasted when in fact it was all systems "go".

I think it just brought them back on their heels to find that most of the organization was being done by volunteers. I volunteered my time--I worked fulltime, 14 hours a day for four weeks and NAC couldn't afford to pay me so I volunteered my services because it had to be done and it had to be done well. We didn't see anybody else around who was going to be able to do it and I knew that I had the skills we needed. There were other volunteer people who moved in, did the job, and did the job competently. I think the networks were astounded that they could get that kind of quality of performance with volunteers. Betty Stanley, our media liaison person, kep kept saying, "We can do it--women are so much better at organizing than men." She just kept repeating that--"We can do it. We're great at it, we'll do it." And I guess we believed we could do it and we believed it had to be done. I can remember having this sense that I couldn't think of all the problems at the same time or I would just really get depressed. So what I'll do is I'll think about this problem and I will solve this problem and then I will think about the next problem and until I solve this problem I will not think about the other problems. It was just like chipping away at a wall and finally we got through to the other side.

Also, Mother Luck was with us. Amazing things happened. About July 23 I had a meeting with Chaviva. I had sort of worked out in my own mind a critical path of what had to happen at certain points so that by the 15th we were systems go. I had put about a week of work in and saw that the next main area that had to be developed was media and media policy. Because this was a national event, in fact we were having international news agencies expressing interest, and because it was a limited situation, you couldn't let in everybody with all their cameras. We needed a fulltime media person. So I went to my meeting with Chaviva and at the top of my agenda was getting a media liaison person who really knew her stuff. "It was a very interesting telephone call I just got," said Chaviva. "The head of the Family Services Association of Ontario called up and volunteered their media liaison consultant free of charge to NAC for the next three weeks. We have her. She's experienced, she knows her stuff and she's coming over this afternoon at 2 o'clock." That kept happening. We would need somebody and that person would miraculously appear. We would need something and that something would miraculously appear. It was almost too easy at times.

M: Why a debate--of all the possible options--why that?

N: Well, I guess it was part of the culture--that's one of the things that happens during elections. I think historically NAC has been trying to arrange this and had never been able to get agreement. NAC has had luncheons for leaders but they were private meetings, basically, with women. NAC felt it was important to get the leaders on the record and also to have an indepth kind of exploration. A debate sparks that kind of thing happening because you just don't get up and make a prepared speech. Somebody's challenging you.

"The fact that the American politicians were taking it seriously made the Canadian politicians take it seriously."

M: Why the leaders' agreement to participate in the debate this time?

N: Well, I think the whole culture was ready for it. You see my theory--and it's only my own private theory--is that culturally we are really greatly influenced by what happens in the U.S. and we're usually about 10 years behind. women's issues in the U.S. peaked about 10 years ago--around 1975. There was a lot of media attention and then the journalists said it was out of style, it's gone away. Of course it hadn't, it had been grouping and regrouping. But in politics these issues seem to come up in 10-year cycles. You had that peak in the U.S. in 1975 so that like a lot of other things it hit us about 10 years later. So we got our first peak in this election when women's issues really started to emerge in the political arena. At the same time the U.S. is having the second cycle so you get a reinforcement of what was happening here. It put us in a really strong position because those two cycles started to merge. The fact that the American politicians were taking it seriously made the Canadian politicians.

M: There was an aweful lot of negotiating at various levels. What was that like? What did it involve and particularly, did NAC have any bottom line below which it would not go, whether over logistics or over basic philosophical grounding? What was that bottom line? Did you have any struggles around that?

N: NAC had an agenda for format and of course for a variety of other things. NAC basically wanted the event to happen, so that was the central mission. It basically wanted a public debate, not just a televised studio debate, but a public debate and it wanted it televised as well because that meant people right across Canada could see it. It wanted to be able to ask the questions. So the really bottom line was--we maintain total editorial control. Also, we wanted the ability to choose our questioners. The networks really wanted to be able to put in their journalists or somebody from the broadcast media, but there is always editorial control in that case in that certain networks can't ask certain questions because they have to reflect the editorial policy of the network. So, those were the bottom lines--that we wanted to be able to choose people who were acdeptable to NAC who were knowled-

continued page 4

...skill, bluff and Goddess-luck

geable about the issues, who weren't just professional broadcasters doing a script but who had enough knowledge not to take any bullshit. We also wanted someone editorially independent who would in fact reflect NAC's concerns in their questioning. That was our bottom line and we got that. There was of course some negotiation.

There was no disagreement on the French. We were thinking one-third, two-thirds because it was an Anglophone audience in Toronto. The leaders insisted on one-half, one-half. NAC really didn't object, so we compromised on that.

Some of the leaders' representatives didn't want it to be a live audience--they were very nervous about getting a stacked audience. The Liberals and the Conservatives were afraid--and logically so--that the NDP had a better claim on women's issues because they have more of the right answers in their platform. They were aware that they were vulnerable and they were afraid of having a stacked audience.

M: It must have been hard for NAC to ask the audience to remain silent because so much of the theme of our work is to end our silence?

N: We were prepared to ask people to remain silent mostly out of concern for not interrupting the broadcast because our mission was to get as many of the issues before as many people across Canada as possible. We didn't think it would be a stacked audience. We thought that people would be fair. Party people really wanted to put RCMP in every other seat prepared to muzzle people. We weren't prepared to do that.

M: Where did the questions come from?

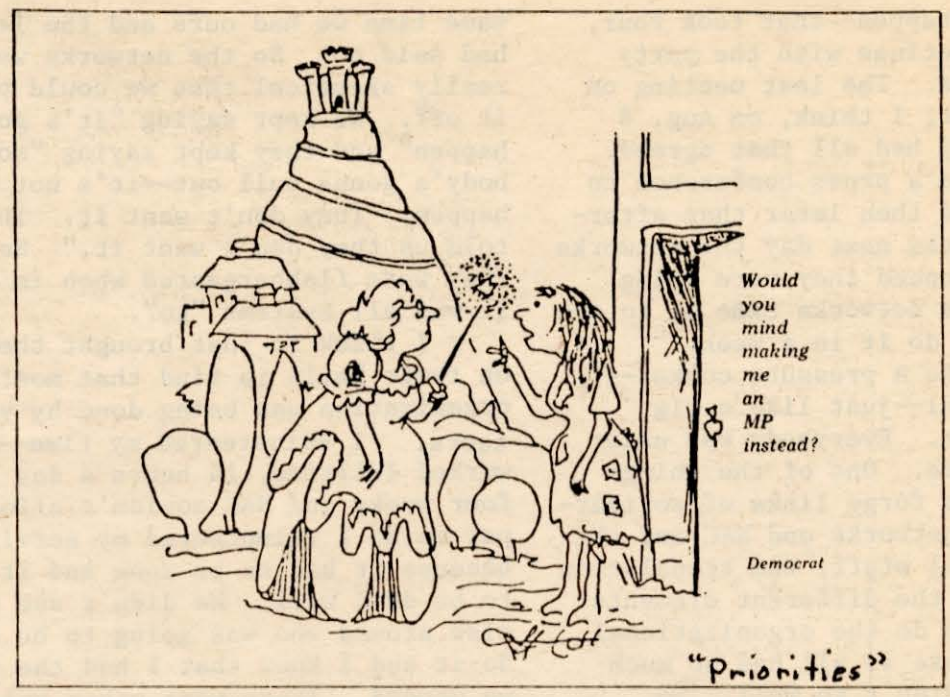
N: There was a small committee of NAC struck. Lynn Kaye was involved. Doris Anderson and a couple of other members of the executive also. It was a fairly strong group of five or seven. Suggestions and questions were fed in from across Canada. They worked for three or four weeks on the questions.

M: Where was that conviction to do the debate no matter what coming from?

N: I don't know. We felt it was important to do it no matter what. We could go ahead and have the event and that as long as we communicated that the event was going to happend, everybody would want to come on board. But the moment we seemed to say "it's up to you whether we have this debate" then that would have shifted the power and the control either into the networks hands or the party representatives' hands. So one of the struggles throughout it all was over "we're in charge, we're organizing this and we have invited you and that's all". This gave us a sense of power and control that we maintained all the way through.

M: What do you think this is going to do to our relationship with media? How they view us and how we deal with them?

N: I think they'll see us as a power to be reckoned with. I really do. We did pull it off. It happened. That event happened and it went on six networks, international radio and Time and Newsweek were there. All of the media in this country were there. We showed them. We did it. We pulled it off. I think we are a power to be reckoned with now. If



we can pull that off, what else can we pull off? We can do anything we choose to believe we can do.

M: How did you stay sane through it all? What were your support systems?

N: I really enjoyed it. I'm not sure everybody else enjoyed it as much as I did. I came home and told my husband that I was going to do this and he said "this is the kind of thing you're really good at--figuring out how to do something that's impossible with no resources". I had a sense of having a tiger by the tail. All I had to do were two things--see that the tiger didn't bite me and I couldn't let the tiger get away. I tend to think in terms of visual images and that was the visual image that I had throughout the whole thing. At times I was swinging the tiger over my head. ... It's really good when you know what your mission is--the mission was that it was going to happen and the secondary mission was getting it televised and to have our questions asked. We had a lot of other minor things we wanted but the things we wanted just flowed out of that. And we knew when to give to make sure that those central missions happened. And knew when to hold firm. Luck was with us. Chaviva kept saying, "Mother God, she is with us."

M: Are you going to assess the event --how it happened and what comes our of it?

N: We are going to have post mortems. We talked to the networks a little the night of and they do sweeps--each individual network does surveys and they can tell how many people they came in with, when they started losing them and what people basically thought about it. At least one of the networks has offered to share that information with us in or to help in our assessment. The NAC people are certainly going to want to sit down and the people who volunteered in central roles are going to want to sit down and say "what did we do right and what did we do wrong--where were our missed opportunities, what went right that we want to build on, why did it go right"?

M: Has it changed you at all?

N: I don't think so. I always knew I could do it. Yet, it's been a very strengthening thing for me in that it's confirmed my sense of my own abilities and it's also given me a lot of new experiences. I didn't know much about broadcasting bilingual translation, some of the technical things. Now I can talk about patching in along with the best of them. Before I didn't even know what patching in meant. I learned a lot about what I didn't know about the whole live television culture. And they are fascinating people--the people who do that--and they're very different from the party people. They have a whole subculture and whole way of operating and the broadcasting people have a whole subculture and a way of operating. I found that fascinating--one of my roles was often to negotiate between these subcultures--listening to what one group was saying and trying to interpret it to another group and working it out so that everybody sensed their subculture was satisfied. So, for me it was a very fulfilling experience. One is always happiest doing what one does best and this happened to be a situation which I felt quite comfortable in. The only problem is you can't make a career out of organizing events like this. Many people have said, "Well, now what are you going to do?" I have a couple of ideas which you will hear about soon enough, I am sure...

A NAC debate vignette

-The media kept saying the women cheered and applauded and booed along party lines during the debate. I was there and I saw it differently. The woman on my left was wearing her Mulroney buttons, the woman on my right her Turner buttons and the woman in front of me said she was an NDP supporter. Several times during the debate all three were on their feet at the same time applauding one leader's comments about things like peace, abortion and "why should we trust you now?" When Turner said that first we must improve the economy and then we can improve services to women, the Turner supporter let loose with a deep, throaty growl that slowly became a long, resounding hiss.

A CONSTANT STRUGGLE

Feminists dealing with isolation

By Vashti

A motley crew are gathered in Grande Prairie to give birth to Webspinner. We are struggling to discover what it is we have to say. What is is like to be women struggling for women in Grande Prairie as opposed to Edmonton, Lethbridge or Rocky Mountain House? For me the issue of isolation is important. Not that we're the only isolated place in the world. Lots of you who read this may be far more cut off than we. And, let's face it, as feminist women fighting patriarchy, wherever we live, we deal with isolation. Are we crazy, weird misfits who believe in the impossible? Do we deserve the looks of scorn, the threatening reactions to what we proclaim? How do each of us deal with the fact that we are few and far between and therefore each of us face isolation?

I've only lived in Grande Prairie for a year and already I've accepted the fact that it's a greater distance from Edmonton to Grande Prairie than it is from Grande Prairie to Edmonton. I have experienced cabin fever and can joke with the best of prairie folk about the the length and severity of our winters. I am developing the survival skills of the physically isolated. I do recognize the audacity of someone from Grande Prairie, a city of 24,000, writing about isolation when it is the people from Waterhole, Wanham or Hythe who really have a right to. However, in this area of the province there is a long history of isolation. Many folk are the families of homesteaders who left their countries, cultures and homelands to build a life in God knows where. Ethnically, WASPS are isolated from Ukranians who are isolated from Indians. Grande Prairie itself has a transient population--transplanted Maritimers, central Canadians or folk from other parts of Canada whose stay here is coupled with isolation from their home area and families.

So we have a right to speak of isolation--and we are about to. When I speak of isolation the intention is not to limit it to physical isolation. As feminists, perhaps emotional, ideological and spiritual forms of isolation are even more to the point.

What follows is a selection of our thoughts and comments as we talked together.

M. On the one hand, I'm coping OK with isolation yet at times I feel that something vital, something necessary and essential to life, is missing for me. For the most part I realize that I am reluctant to look at that. When friends call and say they are worried about how I'm coping then I'm forced to think about it and lately I've felt a need for community and the stimulation and support that comes with it.

D. L and I were talking just last night about not feeling part of the community--it leads to a feeling that part of you is dying.

L. I feel a need for a strong feminist community. All day at work I'm surrounded by people who talk only about their kids and families. When I'm around other women, like today, I feel so strong and connected and that's so important. I miss it when it's not there.

In one way, my times of isolation have been good. I found that I had to start dealing with myself in order to live with myself. Now that I've started that process I want to stretch and share. I'm moving on and it feels so good!

V. I've found times of isolation necessary in my life when I've had to break into something new. Perhaps isolation is always a time of self discovery. My move to Grande Prairie meant leaving family, friends and familiar territory and for a while I thought that the only one that was profitting from this was AGT. Sometimes it bugs me how they capitalize on people's feelings of isolation--all that long distance feeling stuff . However, now that I see the light at the end of the tunnel I know how good it's been for me.

D. Yeah! Isolation can be so positive. It's not always like you're on some bleak island with only a palm tree for a friend. Sometimes we choose for ourselves to be isolated. Because it's what we need to grow.

M. Isolation is good when it's balanced with times of 'getting out'. I remember how important my first ASWAC meeting was. There were women like me all together talking. In enabled me to live on in Northern Alberta.

V. Last year I didn't 'get out' from January to May and by mid-April I was climbing the walls and no good to anyone. From that experience I've realized that I'm important enough to deserve some 'time out' each month. I plan for it and I take it.

There are other ways I cope too. If I can't get out and need to, or if there's no-one to talk to I fantasize--music helps. Does that make sense?

Also, I've learned to live on through the pain trusting it has an end, looking for the light in the tunnel and it's always there.

M. You know being here has helped me to connect with how isolated I sometimes feel at home. Even when you live with someone you can be isolated from them. That's painful at times.

V. Yeah--we tend to think that single people living alone are the most isolated ones. But I think it's even more painful to feel isolated when there are people close that you long to share with. Struggling with that is important too.

Our conversation describes our feelings and thoughts about isolation. Now to carry it further. I was asked "how does your isolation and how you deal with it affect your feminism, and how do you live that out?

I can only begin to answer it. The fact that I live and work for much of my time in an environment suspicious and ignorant of my feminism has, believe it or not, made my feminism stronger. God knows I am not a feminist because it's the in thing to do. Every time people get angry or uptight because of what I say, or try to label me a man-hating women's libber, I know that I've hit a sore spot--what I'm saying must be true. Why else is it so frightening? Why else are people so quick to isolate and label me?

One woman wonders how long we can stand being isolated and rejected. I don't have an answer for that. I only know that now I feel strong.

Being a Christian feminist I often find myself trying to re think and experience biblical material into usefulness. I am drawn to the strength of the old testament prophets. They felt the call to proclaim the truth to the people. They named injustice and called for change. The people of course had too much invested in their systems and power games to hear. They isolated the prophets calling them crazy, recognizing the truth in their messages only long after they died. We feminists are prophets called to proclaim what we see. The isolation of our experience attests to the truth of what we say.

When I am confident that what I say and do is important the choices I make reflect that. I no longer go with the flow of what others would like or expect me to do. I make decisions based on the quantity and quality of the energy it will generate. Someone said today "I find that honest paths are energizing and dishonest are not. That is the CRUX of the matter--when we are confident and called to proclaim truth we have no time for dishonesty.

True there are many times when I am forced to compromise and bite my tongue to survive, many times when I live with things that should be challenged to avoid a hassle. The best of us fall into the trap of cluttering our lives with junk to defend ourselves. We are good at getting ourselves into treadmill routines--refusing to slow down and look at things. The challen ge is to avoid causing our own isolation by surrounding ourselves with what is meaningless and trivial. Only then can we make deciaions with the honesty and vitality that will move us into a new world.

Lesbian archives now open

The Lesbian Archives of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario officially opened in September. It is located near Kenora, Ont., 135 miles east of Winnipeg, just off the Trans-Canada Highway. This project came into being through the efforts of many women who preserved our holdings, some of them for over a decade, and through the efforts of lesbians in Kenora and Winnipeg who are working to combine all these collections into a lesbian archives.

The goals of the founding archivists are to preserve, honor and share the herstory of gay women and to make this herstory accessible to both rural and urban lesbians. Too often there is no accessible community or recorded herstory so a lesbian mistakenly feels she is the only one.

For too long cities have absorbed most of our lesbian energy, but in some parts of this continent the trend is now beginning to reverse. We acknowledge the importance of this change by housing this archives in a rural location. It will be easily accessible to many urban women, since the Kenora area is a summer playground for Winnipeg residents, and since we are located on the Trans-Canada Highway. But if there is to be an imbalance in accessibility, we have decided that for once, it will favor rural lesbians.

Our present collection consists of: publications, clippings, unpublished papers, records and memorabilia preserved in Winnipeg through the Lesbian Resource Centre, Victor St. (early Seventies)- A Woman's Place, Agnes St. (mid Seventies), Winnipeg Lesbian Society and A Woman's Place, Walnut St. (mid Seventies), Wages Due Lesbians (late Seventies) and the Women's Building (1978 to 1983); publications and books collected through Voices, Kenora (1980 to present); three individual collections and other individual items.

These holdings include a number of Canadian lesbian and women's periodicals published in the early Seventies (Pedestal, Windsor Woman, The Other Woman, Long Time Coming, Belly Full, Velvet Fist, On Our Way and newsletters from across the country). Also, there are lesbian and women's publications from the mid and late Seventies from Winnipeg, Sask-

Communiquellos

atoon, Calgary, Vancouver, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Montreal. There are a number of lesbian and gay publications including one of the first issues of The Happenings from Winnipeg in the late Sixties. Their Girls' Page makes interesting reading indeed! We also have a number of American papers and magazines. Few of these collections are complete, so if anyone has any to donate, please contact us.

Other holdings include unpublished papers, a few memorabilia, books, tapes, posters, buttons, a large number of clippings and some organizational records.

We need your assistance and ongoing support in the form of materials, free advertising or money. We would like our existence to be made known to all lesbians who are living in or who once lived in this areas, so please spread the word. We also appreciate assistance from elsewhere, especially publications, books, tapes, records, journals, posters, art--and visits! From lesbians in this region we are asking, in addition to the above, for journals, autobiographies and other unpublished writing or art, organizational records, buttons, posters, t-shirts photographs and any other memorabilia. If you are cleaning house, don't throw things out!!! Instead, give us a call. In Winnipeg, call Erin Cole (204) 256-7740. In Kenora Isabel Andrews (807) 548-4325.

Donors may categorize their materials as: 1). open 2). restricted access (specify) or 3). no access for a specified time period. In the case of photographs and other unpublished material which identifies individuals, donors should obtain the permission of these individuals before sending this to us.

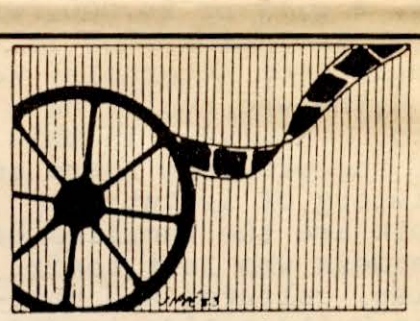
We plan to publish a short newsletter listing our holdings. The first issue will be mailed out with Voices and to newsletter subscribers later this year. All donors will receive a copy listing their contributions to our holdings; please let us know if you are agreeable to publishing your name with these acknowledgements. Subs. will be $5 for five issues; sustaining subs. are $20.

For more information or to make a donation, contact: Erin Cole, L.A.W.R., P.O. Box 147, Winnipeg, Man. R2M 4A5 (see phone above) or Isabel Andrews, R.R. #2, Kenora, Ont. P9N 3W8 (see phone above). Please make cheques payable to L.A.W.R. (Archives).

More debate vignettes

By Meaghan Dean

-I'll never forget what it felt like to be standing in line with 2,000 women waiting to get into the hall just before the debate. The noise, the cacaphony of sounds as 2,000 women celebrated what they knew was their night. Hearing women laughing in a way you seldom hear us laughing when men are about or when we sense it is unsafe--quick, loud guffaws, heads thrown back, dangling earrings tossing, glittering, dancing in the light of the chandeliers.



Monitoring project underway

By Julie Anne Le Gras

Mediawatch is planning a national monitoring project for October and November. This is in conjunction with the end of the two-year 'self-regulation' period which was adopted by the broadcast media (radio, TV and pay TV).

Readers interested in participating, please contact me by mail (10647 125 St, Edmonton AB T5N 1T7) or by phone: 482 2766. The project will run from 4-6 weeks, and require a few hours per week of your time. The more women monitoring, the less work for each. Time schedules will, of course, be negotiated.

If you're annoyed/insulted/angry about sexism in the media, this is your chance to be active in that struggle. Let me know soon.

You can also contact me for complaint forms, information, and more involvement.

A MAJOR EVENT

CRIAW conference soon

The conference of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW) will take place at the Université du Québec à Montréal Nov. 9 to 11.

Entitled Women: Images, Role-Models, this conference will bring together 800 to 1,000 women from across Canada. We particularly wanted to give the floor to women from diverse sectors (representatives of women's groups, indigenous women, artists, creators and faculty members). These women will contribute to clarifying the complex relationships between the images and role-models of women and their concrete existence, their subordinate position and their liberation.

The 1984 CRIAW conference will include 90 discourse/debate sessions, 16 workshops/panel discussions, five plays, two dance presentations, two monologues and numerous films, videos, slides, etc. It is organized in cooperation with the Groupe Interdisciplinaire pour l'Enseignement et la Recherche sur les Femmes (GIERF) of the University of Quebec at Montreal.

A detailed program of the conference is available from Marie Vallée, Department of Political Science, Université due Québec à Montréal, P.O. Box 8888, Station A, Montreal, Que. H3C 3P8, phone 282-4430 or 282-4522.

Some thoughts and feelings on evil

By Trish Wright

I've been trying to think about evil. I read a biography of Hannah Arendt this winter and I felt the excitement of intellectual stimulation, a "deja vu" reaction to her spiritual quest and and admiration for her very individual path.

Hannah Arendt was born in October of 1906 in Germany. She was a Jew. She studied philosophy. She fled Germany during World War II. In 1951 she wrote The Origins of Totalitarianism. In 1963 she wrote Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. In 1965 she wrote On Revolution. In 1970 she wrote On Violence. In 1975 she died and in 1978 two volumes of her uncompleted work The Life of the Mind were posthumously published, edited by Mary McCarthy. She wrote a lot of other material but I listed these to "flesh out" her character to you a bit.

I had and have free-floating questions about evil. When I read in her biography about her attempt to understand the nature of evil, I started letting my questions bounce off her ideas. I learned something and my questions have changed.

After World War II Israeli agents looked for Adolph Eichmann, a former German officer chiefly responsible for deporting Jews to Nazi concentration camps. In 1960 Eichmann was found in Argentina. Israel kidnapped him and took him to Israel, where a court found him guilty of war crimes against humanity. Adolph Eichmann was sentenced to death and hanged.

This history makes me reflect about the nature of evel (what was Eichmann like?), the guilt I feel about my lack of pacificism (I'm glad he was kidnapped and the courts and lawyers weren't used) and the completeness and rightness I feel about his execution.

Hannah Arendt wrote about what seemed to be a startling dimension to his character. He tried to make himself appear greater and wanted recognition. She watched the trial and wrote after his execution several months later and realized that he seemed pathetically comic. He was very stupid but also somehow not. She concluded he was unable to think. Arendt talked to her husband about this and he said he sometimes wondered if evil was "a superficial phenomenon". That was a seminal idea that led her to subtitle her book The Banality of Evil. To call evil banal is to call it common and ordinary, lacking originality, freshness or novelty. That reduces evil and reduces the people who perpetrate it.

That means to me that I mustn't let evil become a road to public confirmation and recognition. I don't want my questions about the nature of evil to be a fascination with or an honorable attention to evil people. To let an evil person scare me or change me is to give power to that person. I don't want to do that. My power is important--I want it to be used for things that are good.

How do I do that? I like what Brecht said: "The great political criminals must be exposed and exposed especially to laughter." I want to meet evil and understand eveil and in a life-affirming way fight back. I want to laugh at it and take from it the power it otherwise can have.

Once I met a woman with the same name as me. I felt as though I knew what she was thinking and feeling. She was very intuitive. She recognized good energy and good feelings. But it seemed to me that she hated them; that she knew how to shatter others' good energy with remarks and with actions. I imagined she saw that I understood that she could see good energy and wanted to destroy it and knew how. She tried to find my good energy and use it against me. For example one night about 20 women were having a wonderful and positive talk about ideas and feelings. We were sharing much on ending the silence about violence against women. We were at picnic tables in a wooden barn that was the dining room. The fire was burning. It was dusk.

An excitement of sharing and understanding came into the room. We were exploring and understanding and making our own and new consciousness about us as women.

Abruptly this woman stood up. But she seemed to clothe her anger in passivity and restraint. A woman at my table had just finished a passionate honest explanation of her feelings. This woman stopped in front of our table and said, "You're hysterical. You ought to see a doctor about that." She walked out.

I can so clearly remember how I felt. This woman is middle-aged. She's wrinkled. She's small. She's poor. She appears so powerless. I felt quilty that I was so angry at her. I am young. I'm strong. I'm big. I'm not poor. I have so much. She has so little.

I felt unsure about my assessment of the situation. Had it really been so good a moment and had her remark had such a destructive effect on that good?

I felt ashamed of my thoughts of righteous aggression towards her. I felt how politically incorrect those thoughts were. I had attended some recent workshops which focussed heavily on the peace movement and its philosophy. I was reading a biography of Ghandi.

I went and chopped wood for an hour. I breathed deeply in the fresh air of the ranch. I positioned logs and held the big axe above my head and put all of my strength behind every stroke down. I gripped that smooth axe handle and concentrated on the beauty of skin against wood and the way two hands and two arms can grasp an axe and work so well together to cut wood to use in creating the warmth of fire.

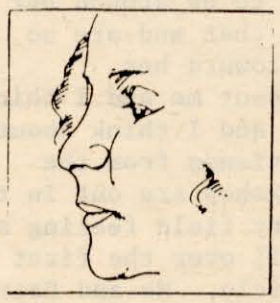
I felt still like a volcano waiting for a place and time to erupt. I put the axe against the woodpile and went looking for her. She knew I was looking for her. An hour later she came back from a walk. I saw her from one end of the camp. I followed her into the bunkhouse. She had a room all to herself. There were four bunkbeds in there but no one else had chosen to sleep in there.

I closed the door.

"Go home," I said. "Go home tonight. I'll get a ride for you. I'll drive you. I don't want you here. No one wants you here. Everyone would be happy if you left. Even if you stay remember this every day. No one wants you here."

After the concert that night someone came to tell me this woman was sitting under one of the dining room tables talking to herself.

I left soon after. She stayed.



I don't remember if I ever was afraid of "mental illness". I always found people with "crazy" ideas the most interesting. I used to work with people with psychiatric labels of mental illness. I've always mistrusted people who found it easy to differentiate crazy and sensible. I've always found "sensible" ideas to be so insane.

But I feel angry with anyone who uses their "weakness" as a hook for my guilt. I have played rescuer too often--too often for my good and for the good of those I "rescue". I feel so personally acquainted with the tyranny of the weak. I examine al relationships so I won't be tyrannized and terrorized.

My mother was 28 when she got married. She had me when she was 29. She had seven children in ten years, six girls and then a boy.

I loved my mother in such an unattentive way. She read me poetry and books and ironed my father's endless white shirts listening to Robert Frost reading his poem The Road Not Taken. She challenged me, she provoked me and always believed in me. She didn't or couldn't nurture me and I was always thrown back to rely on me.

When I was 13 my mother had a "nervous breakdown". I cleaned up the blood after her suicide attempt. She was in and out of psychiatric wards and saw psychiatrists and went back several times for electro-convulsive therapy.

My love for her changed. While she was gone I cooked and cleaned and washed and tried to be her to my sisters. I relieved her agony, her loneliness, her depression, her emptiness. I asked why I hadn't been enough for her to want to go on living. I understood why and I hadn't been and couldn't be.

She came home unexpectedly. She discharged herself. The psychiatrist was frantic. It was Christmas. I was in the dusty dimly lit basement of my father's general store surrounded by outdated merchandise of 30 years. I was wrapping Christmas presents. She spoke so softly and hesitantly from the door. "Hi Trish."

I loved her so much. I was so glad to see her. I wanted to look

Evil cont'd

after her and never let things be that bad for her again. I hugged her so hard.

My mom is so strong, so intelligent and so hard for me to understand. I live at home right now with my mom and dad. Mom is training me to handle the bookkeeping in the store. I'll never be as good at it as she is.

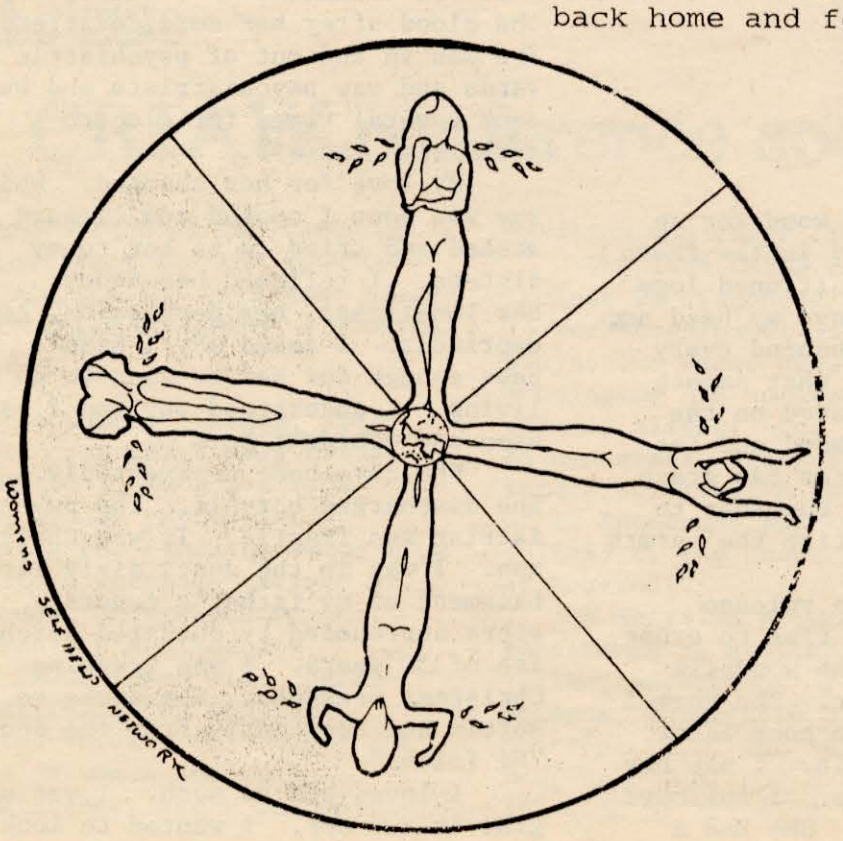
When people talked to her after she was home I hated most of them. Their tone of voice was the one we use towards a little child or an animal that needs gentling. "How are you, Bets?" She is so wonderful. They didn't deserve to be around her if they can't see that and are so condescending toward her.

I think about me and I think about Patricia and I think about my mom. All my friends from the Webspinner workshop are out in the sun on a country field feeling such pain and turmoil over the first half of my article. Me and Patricia and my mom are in here.

Two poems by Delores.

You no more than ripple
Quiet passing
As silent as air
But it's alright
I am not a figurine
Of sand or glass
No clock measures time
At the gate to my heart.

Woman
Where are you
Who leaves a basket
Where I see it
What is it
Manna
From who
Or where



Painful nights

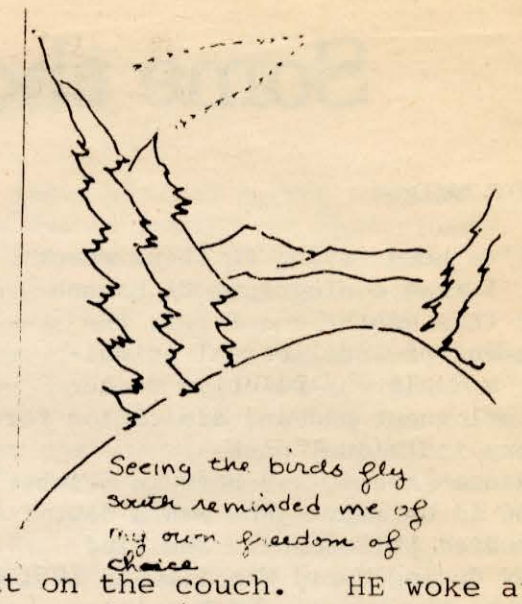
By Suzn Morgan.

Friday evening HE came home drunk again. The kids, two years and eight months, were asleep and I was curled up watching TV. HE began a not unusual tirade over the house being messy and no hot dinner ready. HE began to slap and punch me with a maniacal fury. As I crouched in the corner (crouched so as to protect my stomach and face), HE kicked me several times and physically dragged me to the front porch where HE threw me out, spraining my wrist. "Get out of MY house and don't come back, you pig". Raving and screaming obscenities at me as I lay there on the ground. The sound of the door slamming, the lock sliding into place and then silence.

I lay stunned for a moment and then crept around to the back where I found an old sweater to help keep me warm. I thought I would just sleep outside the kids' window and everything would be calmed down by morning.

It grew colder as the night wore on and my wrist, back and head ached from the beating. I decided that I would sneak in the kids' window and sleep under their bed where at least it would be warmer. I managed to get into the room and hide under the bed but our dog scratched the door open and, followed by HIM, came in to investigate. I crawled sheepishly out from under the bed attempting not to wake the kids. The baby started to cry and I managed to put a bottle in his mouth before HE pulled me from the room.

After quietly closing the bedroom door HE dragged me to the front door. I was crying and begging him to calm down and let me stay in. HE threw me from the porch. Crying, hurting and in shock I walked away from the house. I walked and walked for hours until an acquaintance recognized me and stopped and took me to a cafe for coffee until dawn. I went back home and found him passed



out on the couch. HE woke at noon and, without a word to me, walked out. I cleaned myself up, fed the kids and packed four brown grocery bags with clothes. With my kids in tow, I left that life forever.

I suppose we must have been a ludicrous sight, me pulling a wagon with four bags of clothes and two small children. A friend looked after the children while I searched out the welfare office. It was closed, but after phoning the emergency numbers I was put in touch with a male social worker. HE came and picked me up and we went and filled out forms. All I wanted was enough money to put me and my kids on the bus to Calgary, where I had some family. But no, I would have to wait till Monday when the office opened.

So with voucher in hand HE took me to register at the worst hotel in town (probably the only one that would take vouchers). We went upstairs to check out the room where HE grabbed me and began roughly to kiss me and touch me. Emotionally I cracked inside and I couldn't fight one more time. HE raped me.

HE drove me to pick up my kids and then back to the hotel. I noticed later that my wedding rings, which I had left in the car, had gone. HE gave me vouchers for meals until Monday and said in parting "make sure you keep the door locked, this hotel can be dangerous".

Confused and scared I lay awake both nights as drunken people passed down the hall, sometimes knocking on my door, always partying and fighting in adjoining rooms. I slunk down to the restaraunt to feed the kids and back up to the room as quickly as possible. The kids cried. I cried.

Monday morning I arrived with kids and bags at the welfare office. They gave me bus fare and so I struggled down to the bus depot. After two hours the bus arrived and we were finally on our way. Too many hours later we finally arrived in Calgary.

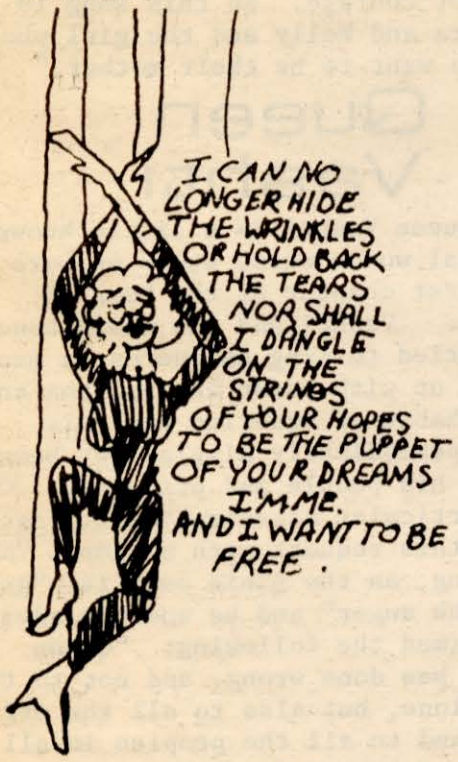
There are no words to describe how I felt upon climbing down from that bus into the hustle and bustle of a modern; big city, bus depot. No one waiting for us...Me, bedraggled and worn out...Two year old hungry with wet pants...Baby fussing and crying...Four grocery bags of clothes, two of them ripping open, spilling onto the ground...

A time of much confusion

By Lindsey

I have been in the hospital for almost a month now, due to complications resulting from a much needed hysterectomy. If nothing else, being flat on your back gives you plenty of time to think. As a result, I find myself in a state of confusion. On the one hand, I have a husband and three young children who need their Mommy, while on the other hand I find I have absolutely no desire to return home. I love my family dearly, but at the same time I have an incredible urge to leave the constant care and attentiom to someone else for a change. Who has looked after me for all of these years? Yes, I had food and shelter, but deep inside me a little voice is trying to call my attention to the fact that the true essence of "ME" has essentially been buried. I have played all the roles dictated by society, my parents, my husband's job, the prayer group--but I no longer fit! I want to break out of my shell--but is it possible without hurting or losing those closest to me? Yes, I've heard all of the theoretical arguments before; that if people genuinely love you and care for you they'll try to understand and stick with you. Unfortunately, reality doesn't always work that way.

Not being psychic, I cannot forsee the future and all of the good things that may come from this change. Hopefully I won't screw things up more than they already are! I can only look at the immediate circumstances and the turmoil that would result.



Many people would say I lead a "good" life. They envy the status of my husband and the financial security. My doctors shake their heads and claim I'm just feeling sorry for myself. Well, in a way they are right. I feel sorry for all the love and caring and enthusiasm with life that has been hidden for all of these years. I feel sorry for the friends lost along the way due to neglect, transfers, or because in someone's opinion they were not suitable. I feel sorry for the living I have missed out on.

Yes, to change right now would mean upheaval, and I'm not certain how my family would weather the storm, but at the same time they are missing out on a genuine person. They have been content with a functioning shell for so long that I don't think they realize that inside I'm a vibrant human being with a lot to offer this world.

yet another debate vignette

-Just after the debate finished I was in the washroom drying my hands. "What did you think?" I asked a well-dressed, middle-aged woman next to me. "Well," she replied in measured, well thought-out phrases, "speaking as a longtime, staunch Conservative, I was disgusted with Mulroney."

"Why?" asks I.

"He didn't say anything. And I'm getting tired of him not saying anything. It makes it awefully hard to vote for him--but I will."

and another

-The International Holstein Association was meeting in a room in the Royal York Hotel right next to the room where the debate was. The Holsteiners adjourned and left their room to be faced with a solid wall of 2,000 women. I noticed they didn't even dare smirk--they just showed the whites of their eyes a lot as they tried to make their way as invisibly as possible through all those women. Once out of earshot, a spate of breeder jokes rippled down the line.

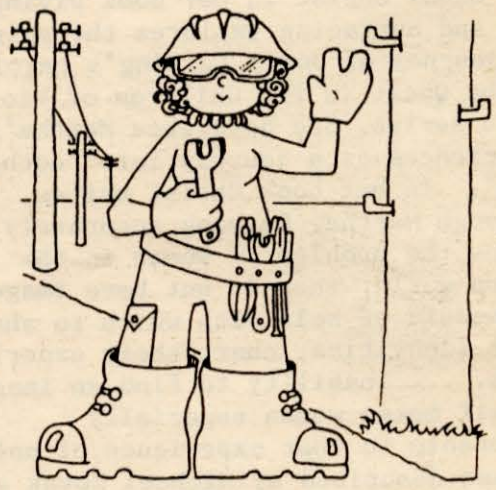
Non-traditional preoccupations

By Delores Clitoris*

*Read on to find out how I got that name...

My being here, right now, I feel is partially due to the experiences and lessons learned during my eight-year indenture in a non-traditional occupation.

The beginning--my first day on the job at the bottom of the ladder --"delivery girl". Just what does a delivery girl do, I wondered, looking askance at the tall, blonde, buxom, legs up to her throat woman I was to replace on the job. What is she expected to deliver and who would be receiving these goods? I was to learn that this job was much more than just taking parts for cars, trucks, tractors and various other types of machinery to shops teeming with crotch-checking, spitting and swaggering



In between the times of delivering parts and hoping I wouldn't get greasy hands on my new shirt, I had time each day to start "working the counter" and my new eyes and ears were developing. Along with trying to look calm and deft when flipping through a four-foot row of catelogues, in search of a correct part number, my teeth grinding habit was starting to form. No, I was not a secretary for there I was "just like the guys"--getting their parts for them.

The apprenticeship training process works so that one year is given in terms of practical training and experience followed by two months at a technical institution. I'll never forget the first day of school, 1,696 pairs of male eyes riveted to me as I walked across the gymnasium half and hour late. School filled me with all kinds of new information, such as how my ass looked --afterall, when you have to walk down a hall of male bodies describing your anatomy to their buddies, it sinks in. My legs grew stronger from having to run to another building to go to the bathroom. (The woman's bathroom in my building now had the honored function of being a broom closet). I had completed my first year of apprenticeship.

Knowledge was the key. I thought things like being forced into the bathroom at work for fondling and frivolity would cease to affect me. A couple of years rolled by--more school, more knowledge --

How a group of welders got rid of a female student--they gang-banged her and she was politely told by administration that her influence on campus was no longer wanted.

How only dykes surpass men in academic ability.

The Alberta Government gave me a wallet-sized piece of identity with my name and "Journeyman Partsman". Is this me? Am I a Journeyman? No, it's a woman's journey through the traps of tradition to the ability to laugh at a man in a downtown parking lot who shouted obscenities when I said, "No, it'll be fine, I can fix my own car, thanks."

SPIRITUALITY

By Vashti *

Carol Christ in her book Diving Deep and Surfacing explores the spiritual journey of Doris Lessing's heroine Martha Quest in the Children of Violence series. She describes Martha's experiences as a journey into "nothingness". In her book Christ writes, "Through Martha, Lessing accurately states the problem of women in the modern world: they do not have images and models of self with which to shape their identities, chart their experiences. ... Inability to find an image of self makes women especially vulnerable to that experience of nothingness described by Michael Novak as "the emptiness, formlessness, and chaos at the center of human consciousness."

Although I have yet to read the Children of Violence series, I am intrigued more than a bit by the concept of women's spirituality as a descent into nothingness. It seems that our discovery of ourselves is tied to a willingness to face our nothingness and isolation. We too easily attach our identity to others. Take away those who need us whether they are our husbands, children, parents, patients or friends and you take away our selves. We descend into nothingness and a journey of self-discovery.

Not too long ago I had coffee with a women experiencing a strong desire to attempt suicide. She and her boyfriend had separated two months previous to this after being together for quite some time and contemplating marriage. She was unemployed and was forced for economic reasons to live at home- a twenty-year-old women subjected to unreasonable pressure to respect curfews, go to church and abide by other family rules designed for adolescents. She found herself getting more and more depressed becoming totally unable to sleep. One night she lie awake fantasizing about swallowing all the pills in her friends medicine cabinet. She called the local crisis line the following afternoon and myself and another volunteer found ourselves talking with her. She knew she was in danger and reached out to get help. It takes a lot of guts to call total strangers.

It seems to me that what this woman was experiencing was a descent into nothingness. All that she had based her life on was gone. She described her depression as a black pit with gray indistinct edges. She was falling deeper and deeper and was scared she would never climb out. I and many other women I've talked to can attest to similar feelings at different points in our lives. Indeed, it seems that as women we've all been there. Sometimes looking back we are led to wonder what we take

with us out of such times. I'm convinced that it is the potential to develop a stronger sense of self and identity. Not everyone who confronts her nothingness emerges strong enough to realize this potential--but I suspect that our sense of self cannot be formed without the descent into nothingness.

We live in a society permeated by Christian values and thought forms. We are fond of saying we experience God in the beauty of nature, in the love of a friend, in the peace of a sanctuary. While this may be true can it be that it is only one side of the coin? It seems to me that most of my spiritual growth comes from confrontations with the Spirit in the places where I am most vulnerable, times when I explore the roots of my deepest fears and insecurities. In the spaces of my nothingness I meet God.

Local play

Salute to innocent courage

By Trish Wright

This summer in Grande Prairie my sister Margaret Wright and I collaborated on a play that ran for three weekends at Grande Prairie's dinner theatre restaurant, Timothy's. Margaret is a very talented actress with a lot of experience in theatre here and has moved to Vancouver to see how far she can go with theatre in a new city.

I had never written a play or any other fiction but had done lots of other writing. I felt excited by the opportunity to write this for Margaret. We worked on the concept together and when it appeared in public it was a play about the comeback performance of a 34-year-old singer, Karen Arthur. She used to sing in a rock band and was deeply in love with and married to the lead guitar player and male vocalist, Vic McKenzie. The marriage ended about two years ago and Karen doubted if she could or wanted to continue in music. But the night of the play she's back. She is now trying to do it her way and sings mellow music, accompanying herself on her guitar.

This is Karen's introduction to Puff the Magic Dragon:

"When I was married I thought I'd sing this next song to my own kids. I had the names picked out--Cora and Kelly.

"Well, now I'm single again and maybe I'll never be a mother. I don't think I could now. I don't feel whole enough or brave enough, I guess.

"I used to feel so full of confidence and love that I longed to share it, to nurture and love children of my own. What a wonderful way for a man and woman to blend their lives. How many hard lessons I had learned that I could tell them about, to teach them, to protect them.

"But when I think of those dreams it's as though they occurred in a different world, a different galaxy. That girl who had them has joined Peter Pan and the lost boys in Never Never Land. I can hardly remember her and I don't understand her. But I salute her splendid innocent courage. So this song is for Cora and Kelly and the girl who used to want to be their mother."

* Queen Vashti

Queen Vashti is a little known biblical woman whose story appears in the first chapter of the book of Esther. Vashti had the misfortune to be married to King Ahasuerus--a man puffed up with power who had the annoying habit of ordering that his Queen periodically display her beauty before his people and officers. On one particular occasion Vashti responded to this request with a simple "No". The King, as the Bible puts it, "grew hot with anger" and he and his advisers proclaimed the following: "Queen Vashti has done wrong, and not to the King alone, but also to all the officers and to all the peoples in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. Every woman will come to know what the queen has done and this will make them treat their husbands with contempt..." (Esther I, 13-17). Vashti lost her place as Queen and the king made plans to replace her with another more worthy woman. A royal edict was issued to this effect in the hopes that all women would hear it and "give honour to their husbands high and low alike". Every time I hear the name Vashti I am reminded of the power we claim when we say "NO". So I humbly use her name as a pseudonym.

How to avoid the pangs of anorexia

By Mair

Lay in bed one Sunday morning some years ago feeling FAT. Said to myself--well, if you're ever going to do anything about this FAT you're going to have to get out of your complacency. Get disgusted with yourself--start to hate the fat and then you'll be motivated to go on a diet and exercise program and emerge slim, healthy and gorgeous.

So I got up, and stood, naked, in front of the full-length mirror in the bathroom. "Look at yourself! Start at your toes, move up inch by inch, be disgusted by all that excess, hate the creases and the dimples and the handfuls". So, I started at my toes..

My first two toes are abnormally wide apart. As I looked at them I remembered how aged about five I asked my mother if there was anything wrong with my feet. "no," she said--"in fact, you're lucky. You're not likely to get corns and bunions from your toes cramping together". And here, aged 40, I was--feet having carried me (fat and all) across half the world, having carried two babies, having worked for their living, and still never having let me down, healthy and strong still. Up I went--calves, knees, thighs (oh my big sensitive thighs), belly! Well, here was the place for yuck! Stretch marks from pregnancies. Tubal ligation scar like a little smile above my pubic hair. Hey, my reproductive herstory is written on my belly--memories of childbirth, the people it produced,the conscious decision not to produce more. How can I hate my belly?

Up some more. My big breasts so attractive to my boyfriend in my teens that sometimes I felt invisible and lonely. Now unfashionable, heavy, sometimes awkward, hard to find clothes that look good. But what is this, hiding under my right breast so that I can only see it in the mirror? A birthmark, formed like a tiny nipple. And I remembered reading, when I was nine, when I could still see it, that this was called a supernumary nipple and proved beyond doubt that I was a witch. It was there to suckle my familiar, and though our family cat showed no interest at all, I knew I came by it honestly. 30 years later, my witches'cackle rang in the bathroom and I moved on up to my face.

Boring face, so ordinary. Made more boring by the fat I was still trying to hate. But-the cleft in my chin--at about the same time I discovered I was a witch (what did I read when I was nine?) I read that a cleft chin is a sign of strength of character. I'm sure this was only supposed to apply to men, but, what the hell, I love my chin and I know and love my strength.

And my eyes! I've watched their changing moods for so long. As a teenager I spent hours gazing into them to see the 'twinkle' which would tell the world I was Irish--a fact of which I was intensely proud. The twinkle would appear when I was happy and disappear when I was sad. I haven't seen it for years, but then I haven't been looking.

My eyes go so deep. When I look within/beyond; when I'm connected to all-that-is, my eyes go on to infinity. Even though my aging muscles require me to prop my book on a table half a room away before I can read--I love my eyes. They've seen so much; given so much; expressed so much and cried so much.

And, they're surrounded by laugh lines. When I was a child (yes, probably nine,) I heard adults talking about 'crow's feet'--someone we knew had crow's feet. What were they I asked, and was told that when people have laughed a lot in their lives deep lines were permanently etched around their eyes. How wonderful! Living, physical evidence of laughter! I started peering into the faces of all my parents' friends. I started wrinkling up my face when laughing (and at other times) to accelerate the process. How could I bear to wait to grow into my laugh-lines? and now, here they are, tangible evidence of a stream of laughter throughout my life which runs deeper and stronger as I grow older and less anxious to 'please'.

Well, a few wonderful white hairs went by as I floated off the top of my head--feeling great; reconnected with my life, my parents, my children, my friends. Why should I hate my body--it is living herstory of a life I've been glad to live. Why should I hate the fat--the more of this wonderful woman the better!

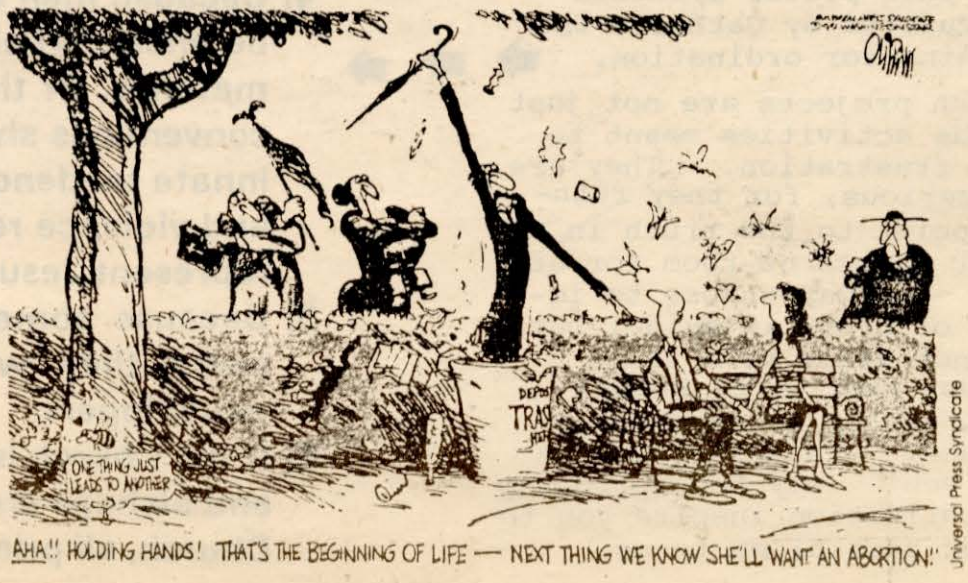
A new film about abortion

"Abortion: Stories from North and South" is a cross-cultural survey of the realities of abortion. It shows how abortion transcends race, religion and social class, and how differences in the practice and perception of abortion are mainly in the degree of secrecy and danger accompanying it.

Filmed in Ireland, Japan, Thailand, Peru, Colombia and Canada, "Abortion: Stories from North and South" lends a voice to women around the world. A Japanese woman describes it as something women "press down and hide". An Irish woman says that until society is prepared to look after all children, we do not have a right to force a woman to have a child she cannot properly care for. A Thai doctor talks about the conflict she feels between performing a service she knows is needed and her spiritual beliefs.

Only a small percentage of the world's women have access to safe, legal abortion. Because of the illegality surrounding it most women risk their health and sometimes their lives in dangerous procedures that are their last resort. Whether abortion is forbidden by law or by selective consent, it is women who must face the physical and emotional consequences of unwanted pregnancies.

Using an approach that is more anthropological than moral or political, "Abortion: Stories from North and South" is meant to be a positive, serious enlargement of the debate. It encourages us to go beyond our beliefs for or against abortion and start asking new questions. It preaches no solutions, offers no easy answers. It is a thought-provoking and moving documentary that invokes reflection and discussion.



AHA!! HOLDING HANDS! THAT'S THE BEGINNING OF LIFE — NEXT THING WE KNOW SHE'LL WANT AN ABORTION!

Healing Laughter

By Vashti

I am a woman working professionally in what's traditionally been a man's domain. Two and a half years ago I found myself dealing with sexual harassment at the hands of a man I was working with. I was shocked, angry and immobilized. It was clearly an issue of power. I had been on the job longer than he. And be damned if I was going to let him push me out. In the end I had to face the fact that he was going to win. I had no support. Leaving was hard and recovery took a while. On looking back, what was crucial to my recovery was learning to let go and laugh. I laughed at that ludicrous situation we call patriarchy and at my pathetic efforts to break through it all by myself. Friends yelling indignantly into the phone about the unfairness of it all enabled me to explode into gut-splitting giggles. I then graduated to the wonderful realm of fantasy--I would get him! One day I woke out of my sleep laughing. I had dreamt that a friend and I had used a helicopter, her flying it and me hanging on a ladder suspended from it--to drop a banner around his house which proclaimed in fluorescent letters, bordered by neon lights, RON IS A BASTARD!!

I admit that there were a lot of tears and serious work done to cope with the situation. I am convinced, however, that my recovery was enabled mostly by the fantasy and the laughter. The release of humour gave me power. When I laughed, I was not as vulnerable; here was a space into which his hands could not reach.

Since that time I've come to appreciate the strength and power that laughing at ourselves and situations brings to us. Have you ever noticed how creative women are in this area? I am convinced that is it one of our greatest gifts.

Take for example, a community of women in Toronto who were depressed by the level of violence against women happening in that city. They posted this poster around town and then had a great time following the reports of how city hall was dealing with the response.

Or, this poster produced and circulated by Catholic women pushing for ordination.

Such projects are not just frivolous activities meant to release frustration. They are deadly serious, for they ruthlessly point to the truth in a way that leaves no room for argument. One may choose to ignore it or brush it aside, but one cannot argue with it.

Thus, sharing of humour and laughter is an empowering experience. Therefore let us empower you! May the following modest collection inspire you to send your best along to us.

City of Toronto

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT AT THE REQUEST OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TORONTO, THE MAYOR HAS DECLARED A

CURFEW

between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m effective immediately for

ALL MEN OVER THE AGE OF THIRTEEN YEARS

THIS MEASURE HAS BEEN DEEMED NECESSARY BECAUSE:

- Last year in the City of Toronto men over the age of thirteen committed:

  500 rapes
  44 murders
  1823 assaults

- Seventy percent of rapes go unreported in T.O.

It is intended that the CURFEW FOR ALL MEN OVER THE AGE OF THIRTEEN YEARS be a first step in a continuing programme to eliminate the public and private forms of violence in women's lives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL

Mr. Art Eggleton 947-7001
Mayor

Mr. Roy McMurtry 965-9111
Attorney General

this is not an official notice.

(We believe that the original idea for this poster came from women in Edmonton. It has also been used in Brandon Manitoba to great effect. Anywhere else?)

Why We Oppose Men's Ordination

1) Because man's place is in the army
2) Because no really manly man wants to settle disputes otherwise than by fighting about it.
3) Women would not respect men dressed in skirts.
4) Because men are too emotional to be priests. Their conduct at football matches, in the army, at political conventions shows this, while their innate tendency to appeal to force and violence renders them unfit to represent Jesus.
5) Because some men are so handsome they will distract women worshippers.
6) If the Church is the Bride of Christ and bishops are as husbands to the Church, all priests should be female.

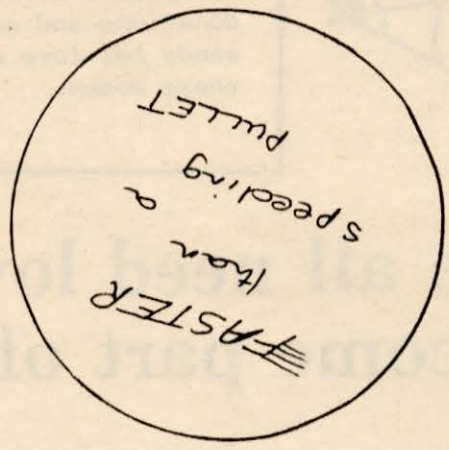
EGGSTRA, EGGSTRA

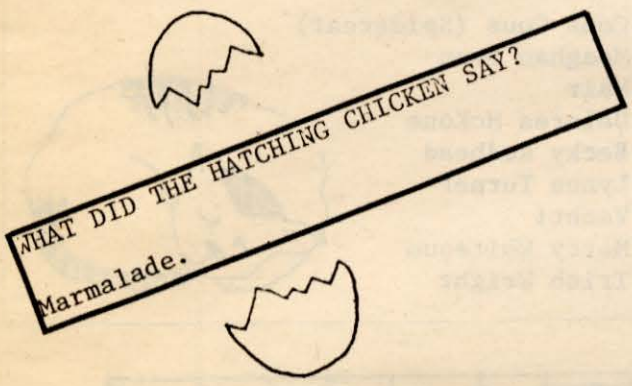
By Benedict
(Lynne and friends)

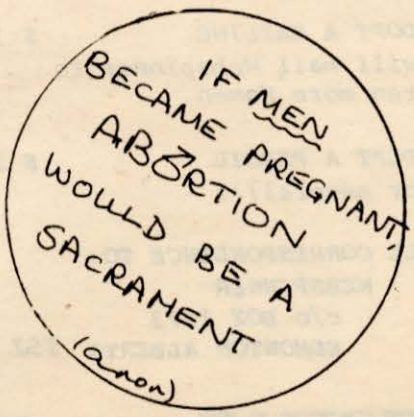
We knew we wanted to hatch a yolk page, but no matter how hard we fried, our humor just wasn't well timed. Our brains were just too scrambled--maybe we just expected too much of ourshells. "Do we really want to eggsercise this option"? we asked. It was time to do some hard-boiled thinking. "Shirred" I eggsplained. "Omelette you hear my idea, but I promise I'll go over easy on you". I felt secure enough to reveal my half-baked plan. "I agree I may be somewhat cracked, but maybe we could poach a few yolks from others".

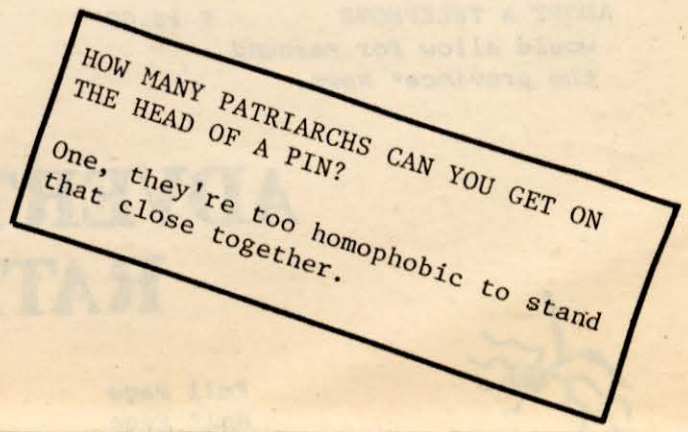
It finally happened. I broke down and fried until the whites of my eyes were runny. Maybe I was too chicken to contribute anything, but I knew from eggsperience that the salad days weren't over. I turned my sunny side up, feeling saucy. "We have a coupla things, maybe we could flip them over for a change. Look at it from my aspic" I dried again. "Ovulate I've been eggzactly on the white track". "Souffle with me", was the consensus. "If nothing else, it will give menopause to think".

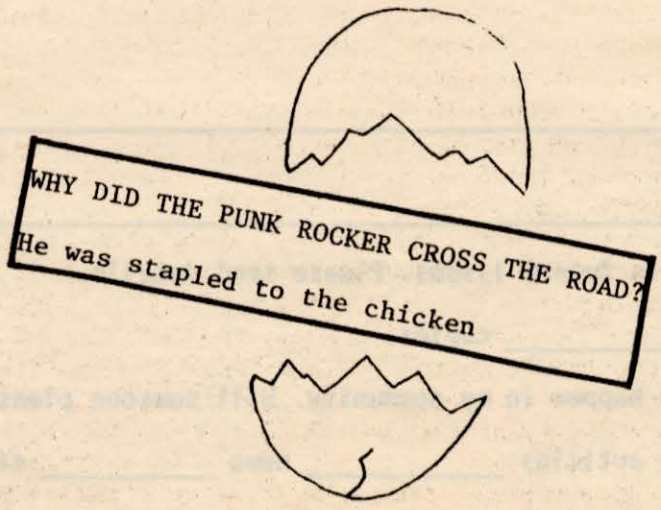
After all, we want this periodical to sell like hot cakes.

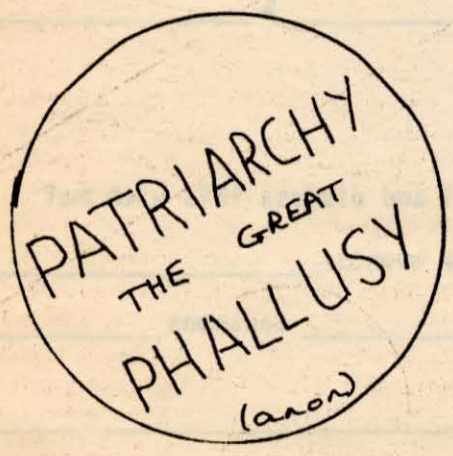


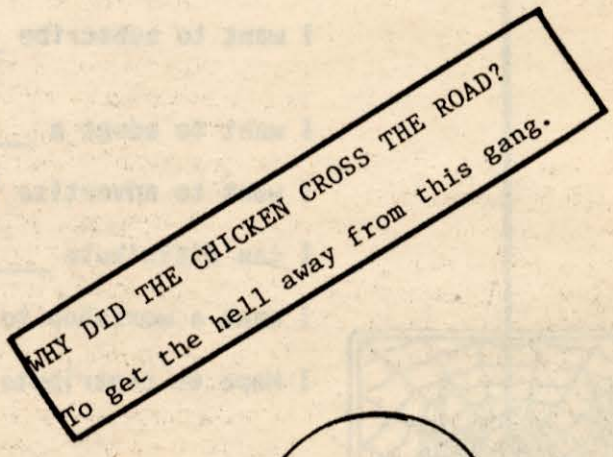


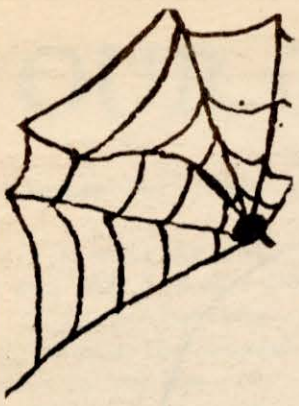








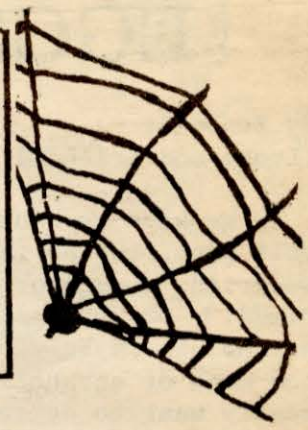




Adoptors, donors...

Webspinner continues to receive donations and new mothers. She sends her love and gratitude to these women.

Anonymous	(donation)
Rita Ranks	(adopted a coffee break)
Linda Smith	2 Typewriters



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Adoptive parents will be listed in the next issue unless you ask to remain anonymous.

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will print 1000 copies.

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will provide snappy typeset headlines for a whole issue.

ADOPT A TYPEWRITER $ 30.00
will rent a typewriter for a workshop.

ADOPT A TELEPHONE $ 15.00
*would allow for *around the province* News.*

ADOPT A WORKSHOP $15.00
pays for 100 km of travel expense.

ADOPT A MAILING $ 3.70
will mail Webspinner to ten more Women.

ADOPT A PENCIL $ 1.00
or several!!!

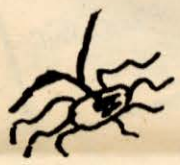
ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:
WEBSPINNER
c/o BOX 1573
EDMONTON ALBERTA T5J 2N7

Spinners

This issue of Webspinner came together in Grande Prairie in the peaceful country home of Delores McKone.
Following are the marvellous women who brought their energy to this issue. We had a feline addition in the form of Meaghan's cat Cous Cous. He's recuperating from a wound and needed daily care, so we brought him along.

Cous Cous (Spidercat)
Meaghan Dean
Mair
Delores McKone
Becky Redhead
Lynne Turner
Vashti
Marty Whitesun
Trish Wright

ADVERTISING RATES



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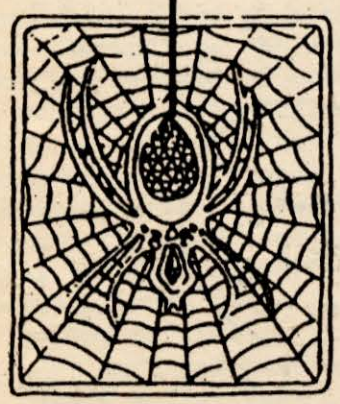
Or, suggest a trade, or negotiate for a special rate because your ad. is an important addition to our information network!

Strengthen the web

Webspinner is produced during five-day workshops throughout Alberta. If your group would like to do an issue, contact WEBSPINNER at:
BOX 1573
EDMONTON, ALTA.
T5J 2N7

Drop into the web... Subscribe now



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I want to advertise in future issues. Please send details.

I can distribute _____ copies.

I want a workshop to happen in my community. Will someone please call and discuss this with me?

I Hope to contribute articles _____ news _____ calendar events _____

photographs _____ graphics _____ cartoons _____

NAME _____ PHONE _____

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